

NORTH MONTEREY COUNTY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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January 3, 2000

Monterey County Civil Grand Jury
P.O. Box 414
Salinas, CA 93902

Gentlepersons:

This letter responds to the findings and recommendations of the 1998 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury.

Response to Findings:

Finding number 1: It is true that STAR test results in Monterey County are low. The County's school districts have accepted this as a major challenge and are working diligently to bring about improvements.

Finding number 2: It would be undeniably beneficial to have fully certified teachers in every classroom. However, this will be next to impossible to accomplish. The implementation of class size reduction in grades K-3 required approximately 22,000 new teachers, a number that far exceeded the pool of qualified and available applicants. The public schools were thus placed in a "deficit mode" with respect to the pool of qualified applicants that hasn't substantially improved. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that school enrollments are increasing statewide, requiring more teachers each year. In addition, a significant number of teachers are at or approaching retirement age. In fact, it is estimated that California will face a teacher shortage of 200,000+ over the next decade.

Finding number 3: At first glance, it would appear that some school boards spend more than is reasonable. However, straight dollar comparisons are difficult to defend. For instance, Chualar Elementary School District and North Monterey County Unified School District each have five Board members. If each district chooses to pay its members' medical benefits and provide minimal training for its members, the costs would be expected to be nearly identical.

Finding number 4: It appears that some school districts incur high costs for crimes. Again, however, straight dollar comparisons are risky to make. Last year's statistics, for

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example, showed the North Monterey County Unified School District had an extremely high cost per crime. However, one of the crimes was an arson that cost almost \$1 million and inflated the cost ratio significantly. Thefts, burglaries and arsons are not easily controlled or prevented, even though all districts try.

Response to Recommendations:

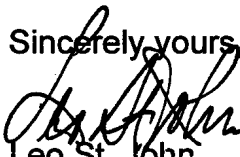
Recommendation number 1 will not be implemented. It appears to be illegal under Education Code Section 44662 (d). It would be certain to cause controversy and strained employer/employee relations under collective bargaining and, in addition, maybe prohibited by existing bargained agreements. Finally, not all teachers are qualified to teach all subjects at all levels, further complicating the issue.

Recommendation number 2 will not be implemented. The District will continue to aggressively pursue qualified candidates. In addition to the issue of credentials, we are equally concerned with the statewide statistics that show new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years. We are striving to provide a high level of support for all our new teachers through the UCSC New Teacher Project, the Monterey County Office of Education BTSA Program and the CSU-MB Intern Program.

The School Board will consider Recommendation number 3. However, I do not believe that NMCUSD's costs are excessive or unreasonable and I will not recommend changes.

Recommendation number 4 will be implemented.

The Civil Grand Jury plays an important governmental oversight role in California. The school districts of Monterey County are all committed to improving student outcomes and the cost-benefits derived from the public's investments in education. Your hard work is appreciated and your suggestions are given serious consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Leo St. John
Superintendent

cc: Board of Trustees